



**Aalborg Universitet**

**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
DENMARK

## **In the closet or coming out?**

*When social workers manage their personal service user experiences in social work practice*

Wisti, Pernille

*Publication date:*  
2018

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Wisti, P. (2018). *In the closet or coming out? When social workers manage their personal service user experiences in social work practice*. Abstract from FORSA/NOUSA Nordic Social Work Conference, Helsinki, Finland.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- ? Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- ? You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- ? You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [vbn@aub.aau.dk](mailto:vbn@aub.aau.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

2018

# IN THE CLOSET OR COMING OUT?

WHEN SOCIAL WORKERS MAN-  
AGE THEIR PERSONAL SERVICE  
USER EXPERIENCES IN SOCIAL  
WORK PRACTICE

PAPER FOR WORKSHOP PRESENTATION:  
NORDIC SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE,  
FORSA/NOUSA 2018,  
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI,  
22ND OF NOVEMBER 2018

PERNILLE WISTI, PHD STUDENT,  
AALBORG UNIVERSITY, DENMARK

## Workshop abstract

Based on the current results from my ongoing PhD project, the focus of the presentation is the implications of social workers' personal user experiences in vulnerable positions. The presentation accentuates the intersection between two differently situated groups in social work: the users and the social workers. Yet, within this intersection, practices in social work unfolds as performed by social workers who also identify as human beings with user experiences. The power dynamics connected to the user experiences draw attention to the social worker's ability to manage their experiences. Related to present discussions of expert-by-experience knowledge, the research puts emphasis on social work practice in which user experiences among social workers themselves can be involved in their practice, whether subtle or deliberate. The research is carried out as participatory practice research in a collaboration with a participatory board of social workers with personal user experiences. Through narrative interviews and practice portraits with social workers with user experiences, the preliminary results imply embedded power dynamics in rules and standards. Within a Practice Theory framework, the social worker's doings and sayings and dilemmas of managing "being a social worker and service user in the same body" are important to professional responsibility, however, a particular empathy can trouble practice and requires self-reflexivity. The presentation concludes a need for further discussions of the stability of norms in social work practice and the legitimacy of social workers involvement of their user experiences as a part of their practice.

## Table of contents

Workshop abstract.....	1
Links between social work practices and personal service user experiences.....	2
Practice research: participation, strategies and preliminary findings.....	3
Practices in social work and participatory practice research.....	6
Practising positions of experience-management .....	9
Are you in (or are you) out? .....	9
Practice makes perfect .....	12
Concluding remarks .....	13
Bibliography .....	14
Appendix 1.....	15

## Links between social work practices and personal service user experiences

---

In a Danish welfare context, peer-to-peer programmes seem hot and trending in social work interventions linked to the service users' personal recovery processes. For that reason, evaluations of such approaches have in been taking place the last few years led by the Danish National Board of Social Services, a government agency under The Ministry for Children and Social Affairs (Socialstyrelsen). The Board is currently conducting further evaluations, which will be published later this year and in the coming years. Yet, such peer-to-peer programmes are, as for now, primarily attached to recovery interventions in (social) psychiatry with an emphasis on the individual as an expert by experience (Korsbek 2013a), who benefits from the role of being a peer and at the same time is able to advice, educate and inspire other peers (Korsbek 2013b). As stated the National Board of Social Services are currently evaluating peer-to-peer programmes in human beings from Greenland in vulnerable positions, human beings in vulnerable positions of homelessness, drug abuse and domestic violence, human beings with blindness and rare disabilities, refugee and immigrant adolescents (Vidensportal). Such peer-to-peer programmes centre in a method based on a premise that the peers are open about their experiences to others and actively benefit from these in their interactions with comparable peers, yet also an emphasis on the relationship with professionals as a part of the recovery process (Korsbek 2016). An example of such premises is found in a course established and developed in the psychiatric field, in a Danish context translated known as "Employee with service user experience" (MB forløbet). The course requires the participants to be an educated health professional, social worker or pedagogue (ibid.).

As indicated the peer-to-peer programmes requires openness about the service user experiences, hence the title of the course. The peer-to-peer programmes' target group are to some degree similar to the participants of my research: professional social workers, including social pedagogues, with personal service user experiences in various vulnerable positions. Some of the research participants have completed the "Employee with service user experience" course.

Yet, according to the preliminary findings of my research, professional social work is based in practices in which far from all social workers are open about their service user experiences, whether with colleagues, managers or service users. In addition, if they choose to be open about their experiences it is not necessarily linked to experiences in psychiatry or recovery approaches. It was not surprising to me as I witnessed the same conditions when I was a student of social work and later in my work experience as a social worker, supervisor of social work interns and educator in social work. The experiences with such conditions made me wonder about the prerequisites of managing personal service user experiences in professional social work. Performing social work in drug rehabilitation with teenagers and adolescents, I met professionals in Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous/Minnesota rehabilitation who were open about their experiences yet doubted by other professionals in their practice. And I met professionals who earlier in life experienced drug addiction but only told very few colleagues and emphasised a need for strict confidence when sharing.

To a limited extend, research about the implications of social workers' personal service user experiences in practice has been conducted (Korsbek 2013b). For that reason, it seemed relevant, appropriate, and beneficial to involve such social workers in the research process about their experiences, as not only interviewees but correspondingly in clarifying and discussing the relevant research focus, question and further research processes. Consequently, my PhD project focus' is practices in social work performed by such social workers.

## Practice research: participation, strategies and preliminary findings

---

The approach of the research is founded and framed by practice research developed through various conferences, collaborations, discussions, and publications in particular during the last decade. Practice research can be described as a young scientific tradition with multiple approaches and comprehensions of what practice research is. Discussions of practice research have among others been taking place in conferences, which led to the currently four practice research statements: The Salisbury Statement from 2008 (Salisbury Forum Group 2011), The Helsinki Statement from 2012 (Helsinki Forum Group 2014), The New York Statement from 2014 (Epstein et al. 2015) and latest The Hong Kong Statement from 2017 (Uggerhøj et al. 2019).

My approach to practice research is inspired by the so-called participatory practice research (e.g. Andersen, Brandt, and Uggerhøj 2017; Uggerhøj 2017; Julkunen and Uggerhøj 2016; Uggerhøj 2014). Participatory practice research involves close contact, negotiations with, and participation of subjects in social work practice such as practitioners, service users, managers, caretakers and more in a close collaboration (Uggerhøj 2014). If we take that the practice research participants represent disciplines (e.g. pedagogy, social work, service user, researcher etc.), the collaboration can be multi-disciplinary. With inspiration from discussions of levels of collaboration (Leathard 2007), the participatory practice research is a setting in which the participants have varying levels of joint working. Collaboration in a qualitative design gives opportunities for impact and relevance of the research to practice, which can lead to innovation and problem solving (Nurius and Kemp 2014; Andersen, Brandt, and Uggerhøj 2017; Uggerhøj 2017; Julkunen and Uggerhøj 2016; Uggerhøj 2014).

In short, my take on participatory practice research aims to produce qualitative-based knowledge with and about social workers with personal service user experiences through collaboration during and negotiation of the research processes. Such collaboration and negotiation establish with a group of social workers with personal service user experiences who participate in the research's practice board. This to make the scientific knowledge relevant, applicable and demanded by the target group (rather than being pushed on the ones) whom it concerns and are likely to utilise and encompass the knowledge in practice. The take does not involve empowerment of the target group or to make specific, measurable changes in practice but to contribute to the influence of the conditions for social work in Denmark.

As participatory practice research is not about evaluating practice or commissioned research, the role of the researcher is, as in most other qualitative research projects, about reflexivity. Berger (2015) emphasises the relevance of the researcher's reflexivity throughout the course

of the study with the highlight of empirical practices. Participatory practice research entails, so to say, a must to “feed” both the practice field and the academic field. Reflexivity is important to more than the data collection(s) or analytical processes. Careful considerations about theoretical approaches to central aspects of the research design are essential matters. Here, inter alia the following discussion of research subjects related to the context and position of the research. This led me to an understanding of the context of social work with an emphasis on both a social and physical arena of practice, which I return to in the paragraph “Practices in social work and participatory practice research”.

The subjects in the practice field are in my research defined as the participants of practice board and the group of informants, who participate in the data production. Both groups of subjects are selected by self-identified educated social workers with personal service user experiences in vulnerable positions. I advertised openly in two social worker unions’ newsletters and journal, as well as online on social media for such social workers, who wanted to participate in the research. My selection strategy is influenced by self-selection. To my knowledge, no associations or forums incorporates a community for social workers with personal service user experiences, which are not directly related to recovery peer-to-peer programmes. As for that, it has been impossible for me to recruit participants in other ways; however, I had an initial response from close to 30 interested individuals. Another round of selection was operated to make sure all future participants were educated social workers. Some of the initially interested individuals withdrew, due to severe health conditions, expressed lack of mental surplus energy or did not respond to my follow-up emails or suggestions to meet any individual needs for special considerations. The final research participants group in 16 informants and 5 members of the practitioner board (of whom two have been replaced due to personal reasons, consolidated 7 members over time). The opening board meeting regarding research questions and approaches was held in spring 2018, another is scheduled in November this year to debate findings and further data production, and yet another is planned to take place in late 2019 to discuss the analysis of the research and potential dissemination.

As participant in the research, yet also in practices in social work, the intersecting positions are performed by social workers who also identify as human beings with user experiences. My research includes participants with service user experiences, who all somehow involve these in their practice, whether subtle or deliberate, hence the workshop title metaphor “in the closet or coming out”.

Above, I mentioned my qualitative approach to knowledge production, which indicates both possibilities and challenges in the research methodology and methods. I combine two qualitative methods: narrative in-depth interviews and so-called practice portraits. Practice portraits, developed in German critical psychology, can be described as a qualitative survey in which practitioners, in earlier studies, psychologists, describe their practices in various aspects, with the aim to develop and share practices in a collaborative process taking place during conferences for the participants (Markard, Holzkamp and Dreier 2004). While I combine two different methods to study social work practice, narratives and written portraits, a theme as transdisciplinary is relevant to scrutinise, when the participatory practice research’s intention is the ability to transfer “*knowledge into effective, high impact, sustainable action*” (Nurius and Kemp

2014: 625). This transference is an example of an approach to “feed” the practice field, as I see practice as a discipline.

Up until now, the preliminary findings of the study is restricted to findings of the interviews, which also lead to inform the questions of the upcoming practice portraits. Thus, I call attention to the fact that the below findings solely are based on the conducted interviews and only represent parts of the larger picture. An illustration of the coded thematics is found in Appendix 1.

I have translated all quotations from Danish, the first language of the majority of the informants and myself, to English. I have anonymised and pseudonymised the interviews according to my applied research ethics and current GDPR regulations.

An outline of the findings suggests embedded power structures or dynamics in unspoken rules and standards of social work when it comes to managing personal service user experiences as a social worker. Embodying being a social worker and service user in the same body narrate both potentials for additional professional competences and dilemmas in the role of the professional social worker related to colleagues, managers and service users and more. Potentials and dilemmas appear in the narratives of the informants’ doings and sayings in their practice. In other words, the doings and sayings, including hiding, non-performing and silencing the experiences, unfold power dynamics connected to the experiences: taboos, stigma and embodying – e.g. looking “the type” who is/was in a vulnerable position – attach and attract doubt, questions and potential praise or judgement from others. The findings suggest a need to draw attention to the social workers’ abilities to manage their experiences from the very first internship of social work education until and after leaving the practice field. The ability to manage the experiences is important to be able to perform in a professionally responsible manner, however also leads a particular recognition of the situations of the service users they meet in practice. Professional responsibility and the recognition seem to both trouble, and enrich social work practice and requires self-reflexivity in a lonesome context: all informants describe the lack of forum in which such reflexions can take place.

Another interesting finding is that all informants have service user experiences from multiple social work interventions. In the initial contact, most described one single category of service user experience. However, during the interviews the informants disclosed more experiences connected to different times in their lives and/or different institutional interventions. An example is an informant’s initial description of a long-time sick leave because of severe mental health issues with a later, almost “by the way” disclosure of previous experiences with years of domestic violence. This leads to underscore the comprehensions and implications of the multiple vulnerable positions connected to the service user experiences.

As the findings indicate complex contexts of the social workers’ personal experiences as service users and multiple approaches to managing these experiences appear to be suitable, possible or unlikely, the analytical takes follow in two. The first temporary pre-analysis is a practice theoretical discussion of the study and participatory practice research methodology. The practice discussion also serves the purpose to frame and inform the second temporary pre-analysis as practice constitute the social work field(s) in which the social workers manage their service

user experiences. Therefore, the second temporary pre-analysis is a data-driven approach regarding management of the experiences with being “out” or “in the closet” in interactions with colleagues, managers and service users.

## Practices in social work and participatory practice research

---

Practice is the core of my research – being participatory practice research with service user experienced social work practitioners, who reflect on their practice in narrative interviews and practice portraits with an aim to develop social work practice. Consequently, I find it essential to place practice as a context, both socially and materially. In the following, I will particularise my approach to practice. Later, I discuss how practice reflects the study’s methodology: the role of the practice researcher and the research participants.

Practice is a complex concept, potentially covering social, institutional, located, subjectivity/agency, administrative, governmental, intervening methods and more aspects. From time to time, practice is articulated in subtle common-sense ways indicating the real world or real life without any further explanation of what practice implies. Such comprehensions of practice might be unclear and imprecise. Studies of and with practice can be refined when the knowledge production is context-dependent and ensures relevance to practitioners (Uggerhøj 2008). Given that practices can differ in all of the above-mentioned aspects, my research limits to include some of those aspects and correspondingly neglect and emphasise some aspects of practice. I approach the term practice as context-dependent activities and knowledge and adapt philosopher Theodore Schatzki’s (2002) focus on human beings who perform practice within social formations; with their bodies and minds, locations/sites and situations. Schatzki, who is considered a second-generation practice theorist, advanced the social (site) ontology, offers a framework of the practice of social phenomena and opening spaces of the social constitution (Schatzki & Natter 1996).

With the perspectives from Schatzki, practice in social work is entitled as “*sets of hierarchically organized doings/sayings, tasks and projects*” (2002:73). With great emphasis on practice as human doings and sayings with equal importance of both, Schatzki states practice is a “... *temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleoaffective structure, and general understandings*” (Schatzki 2002:87).

- Doings and sayings link practice to *practical understanding* in knowing how to do a certain act, to recognise, react and respond relevantly to the specific task (ibid. 77). In social work e.g. to handle case-management or to develop a relationship with a service user.
- Likewise, doings and sayings relate to practice via *rules* having the status of articulations, doctrines, guidelines, standards to instruct, enable and redirect human beings to act certain ways (ibid. 79). In social work e.g. journalising casework according to law or performing social work consistent to local guidelines.
- Practice is informed and constituted by *teleoaffective structures*, which regulate appropriateness, emotions, and moods of, what should or may be pursued and carried out (ibid. 80). Such normative and hierarchically structures owned by practice, and not humans, example as code of conducts, values of social work ethics.



- Last, *general understanding* expresses through doings and sayings as per a sense of the common course of action, a shared involvement and project (ibid. 86). In social work as when social workers coordinate collaborative interventions.

In a Schatzkian practice-scene, the complex context is also incorporated by timespaces, considering that the social world is interwoven connections of practices, which interact and intersect in time (situations, moments) and space (location, site). Timespaces relate to practice, which defines the social world as the site of the social. Within time and space, human beings are positioned and position themselves and others through their doings and sayings in practices. Positions are not a stable or fixed but constantly change when subjects (here identical to agents) negotiate. Subjects seek to do, what makes sense to do within positions in space and time (Schatzki 2002:75).

I place practice as the concept of context framed by what Schatzki names site of the social (Schatzki 2002:152). My elaboration of practice incorporates such site ontological premises. Yet, to study practice as sited and social, an epistemological frame of situated knowledges (Haraway 1988) adds the partial and particular perspectives. When we are near our vision limits to the partial and particular. We are able to distinguish small details of the narratives and portraits with partial fragments of the articulated and particular sections. Such parts can be inputs to an ongoing social dialogue (Uggerhøj 2008). When researching practices through dialogues with service user experienced practitioners, collaborative qualities of knowledge production are essential.

The transdisciplinary researcher Donna Haraway (1988) argued for the lack of the social, historically and semiotically differences in authoritative biological discourses. She intensified her interest in epistemology and emphasised knowledge as differentiated in situated and located contexts. Haraway declares the vision and the gaze upon knowledge depends on the responsibility of active Seeing Eye; the view from a body, the located, positioned and situated partiality considering the "*condition of being heard and to make rational knowledge claims... on people's lives*" (ibid. p. 589). Hence, within which situated, partial perspective is specific information actual knowledge? It calls for discussions of the possibilities in vision and gaze: through the eyes of whom, we perceive.

Power aspects connect to the vision of the researcher - a matter of being in power and positioning oneself in the ability to see. To Haraway, vision is a partial and located alternative to relativism, which makes us accountable for what we learn to see (Haraway 1988). In participatory practice research, knowledge production is not something that belongs to the researcher, but a result of negotiations, processes of learning and not least a research practice which includes relevant subjects from the early research processes (Uggerhøj 2014). In this sense, the knowledge production is a result of collaboration between the researcher and the subjects of study. In my research formed by the participatory board and the interviewees, yet conducted by me.

Being influenced by Haraway's epistemology, my participatory practice research is, just as Haraway conflicts, not about "*appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions*" (Haraway 1988:584). An approach of situated knowledges to participatory

practice research contain complexity and contradictions as a part of the structuring and structured (researcher's and study subjects') bodies as opposed to the researcher's unmarked view from above, 'the God trick' (Haraway 1988). Situated knowledges are about communities, not separated human beings, the potential of broad, or meta-vision exists in the particularly shared gaze. Both researchers and study subjects views are limited, simply because they are situated. To Haraway being situated means, our gazes are coloured by identity categories, personal beliefs, experiences, time, place and contexts and more (ibid.).

Participatory practice research is about the effort to listen to and acknowledge others' perspectives without claiming to see from their positions, as Haraway conflicts. This effort is corresponding to consider positions as situated and enable shared reflexivity throughout the research processes and shared language, which Jabbar (2011) amplifies. As reflexivity is a fundamental characteristic of qualitative research, Berger stresses the *"... situatedness within the research and the effect it may have on the setting and people being studies, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation"* (Berger 2015:220). The situatedness is a core value of the research's knowledge production and I am accountable for the questions I ask while qualifying them via the board meetings.

The illustration portrays the interconnections of practice and indicates how sited practice, with its' tasks and projects, its' doings and say-ings interact with Schatzki's four components, and how timespaces emphasise the particularity of practice. The silhouetted group surrounding the middle of the practice circle are the in-formants. Some of them are visible; the ones I meet and interview. Others are, though just as much a part of practice, invisible to my researcher-eyes; the ones I do not interview. It directs to the point of my limited vision and directs as well to ap-proach of situated knowledges to practice contexts. The lower group is the participatory board, who I collaborate with during our shared board practice. The walking silhouette next to the board is I as a re-searcher. The walking movement signals the need and ability to be flexible as a researcher. As both the board and in-formants, all stand up, which specifies the situated moments, we share. At the particular moment, we all stand (as we might change positions), ready to negotiate and move towards each other.

To sum up the connections between timespaces of practices as the site of the social contained by an approach to the study of social work practices based on situated knowledges, the below illustration is an attempt to portray the interconnections. Within my research position and practice frame,



social work practices are considered as interconnecting doings and sayings performed by social workers with service user experiences

indicated in their tasks and projects embedded by practical understandings, rules, teleoaffective structures and general understandings.

In my approach to participatory practice research, social work practices are possible to study through situated knowledges with partial and particular perspectives and visions of practice in a social site ontologist approach to bundles of practices.

## Practising positions of experience-management

In the below, I will discuss analytical approaches to the informants' narratives regarding how they position themselves and manage their service user experiences as human beings in work-related contexts. Here, I choose to focus on the narratives about "coming out" with their experiences or (somewhere in between) "staying in the closet". The closet metaphor is often used to describe someone in a situation, where coming out is unwanted, risky or connected to being in denial. I do not support such an approach since the closet metaphor involves some kind of normative perception of what is not enough disclosure. Thus, in the following, I will apply the term *passing incognito* (meaning not appearing as or avoiding to be recognised).

Närhi (2016) examines an approach to 'person in environment' to organise social work and outlays the environment as a coordinating framework of interwoven social and physical holistic perspective on human lives. Social workers discussed the notion of 'person in environment' over time (ibid.), however, the focus seems to neglect that social workers are likewise 'persons in environment'. This is where the concept of context – or practice – is relevant to dwell on. As stated above, I relate to Schatzki's practice theory and will in the following solely focus on two concepts: practical understanding and teleoaffective structure in doings and sayings (Schatzki 2002).

Social work narratives about managing personal service user experiences occur in four different positions in a spectrum from out to passing incognito. First, *out* connects to being open about personal service user experiences in all or most work-related situations in encounters with colleagues, managers and service users. Second, *disclosure in specific situations* links to initiate disclosure under particular conditions when there seems to be required or relevant. Third, *indicated or outed by others or structures* attaches to hierarchal positioned others who demand the social worker to out parts of their personal service user experiences. This position also entails structural aspects such work experience gaps in resumes. The fourth and last is the *passing incognito* related to varieties of choices of not to be open or exclusion from being open. Often it is associated with protection of oneself.

### Are you in (or are you) out?

Concerning the first position of experience-management, *out*, the interviewee Anders explains:

*"Related to the group of colleagues, I have always been open about my background. It comes up quickly – an upcoming Christmas lunch, where I say: I do not drink. Personally, I did not know that AA existed, so I am not afraid to say, that I participate in AA meetings. People have to know it exists. Both the person him/herself but also for the sake of their spouses, uncles and so."*

(Anders, Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> of May 2018)

Since drinking (heavy amounts of) alcohol connect to Danish Christmas lunches, Anders choose this topic to share the fact that he considers himself a Sober Alcoholic, a term closely linked to the Alcoholic Anonymous programme–language he is familiar with due to his participation in the meetings and later as AA Sponsor.

One could argue that Anders position as *out* closely links to have a good reason, which reminds of the *disclosure in specific situations* because he does not consume alcohol and plans to attend a Christmas lunch with alcohol served. The announcement of his choice not to drink functions both as a preparation of the colleagues, so they are not surprised or find themselves in uncomfortable situations if/when they suggest to serve him alcohol. Additionally, the announcement connects to what Raun (2012:294) describes as the positive role model, who inspire others. Sharing the message of the Alcoholic Anonymous programme can lead to helping other alcoholics as the 12<sup>th</sup> step in the 12-step programme: “*Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs*” (Alcoholic Anonymous). Considering having a reason or occasion to be out, Anders tells that he has *always been open* and throughout the interview elaborates on the many ways he has managed being open. Due to the position of his narrative, I suggest above quotation as an example of the *out* position, as his position does not limit to specific, planned situations.

As for the second position of experience–management *disclosure in specific situations*, the relevance of why to whom and when becomes highly important. An example of such a position is articulated by Janus, who has been sentenced to jail for “Offences against Public Authority, etc.” under the existing Danish Criminal Code. Janus struggle to find a job, due to the requirement to verify no criminal record. Due to the verdict, he must prepare the appointments committee during various job interviews that he is unable to meet the requirement. He finds himself turned down:

*“When I attend job interviews, by and large, they always turn me down because of the criminal record. It stops nine out of ten of the jobs I have applied for. Even those where my chances were good – it is always the one, which kills it”*

(Janus, Interview, 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2018)

Later during the interview, Janus describes how the caseworkers of the job centre question him when he explains the reason for being turned down. They are surprised and refuse to believe him: simply because he does not “look the type” who abused a police officer. He does not appear to embody the violent “type”.

Such examples of positions mentioned have parallels to coming out narratives, in particular, developed in cultural studies of gender and sexuality. Plummer (1995) found evolving patterns in gay and lesbians’ coming out stories from the suffering adolescent, later struggling with an enemy to the reinforced grown-ups in compatible groups of people. Anders’ narrative can be comprehended as such an example. Manning (2014) argues for seven lesbian, gay, or bisexual coming out typologies that can contribute to further studies of disclosure practices. Janus’ narrative indicates similarities with Manning’s typology “Pre-planned Conversations”, as Janus brings up his criminal record during the job interviews to prepare the appointments committee of what will appear when they later ask for a blank criminal record.

However, I find differences from Plummer's and Manning's approaches to coming out. Positions of experience-management appear blurred in some cases. Cultural studies as Plummer's and Manning's have emphasised coming out conversations, but how about the ones who (partially) choose, refuse or are excluded from coming out? Who has to explain themselves to who?

The third position, *indicated or outed by others or structures*, has similarities with Manning's typology "Coaxed Conversations" in which nudging or hinting someone to come out is involved. The third position of experience-management does not necessarily implicate telling the full story as Manning's "Coaxed Conversation" implies. In spite of this, nudging and hinting "something special" about a person can lead to questions which makes it difficult not to answer. Karina told me how her service user experiences became important for others already from the internship during her social work education. Due to previously failed exams, a longer sick leave related to emotional, and behaviour problems, she was given dispensation to take a final internship to be able to graduate. She describes the internship as a matter of life or death and was told by teachers to communicate her situation to the internship supervisor:

*"My supervisor had to know. I was told to say that by the school... It was not that I could have another try"*

(Karina, Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2018)

Later, Karina explains how she went into details to her supervisor on her reasons to be under pressure during the internship. She felt comfortable about it because of the positive nature of the relationship with her supervisor and was given time off so she was able to participate in therapy-like sessions with a social worker in an intervention for adult children of alcoholics. Karina's position suggests that *indicated or outed by others or structures* involves choices in how much to share and the right to share experiences in a safe environment. This way the position differs from the typology "Coaxed Conversation".

Raun's study of people who identify as trans points how "the closet" circles around secrecy or disclosure "*where it becomes almost impossible to decide when one discloses too much or not enough*" (Raun 2012:331). He argues that coming out as trans includes the risk for the identity to be overdetermined by such disclosure. An example of this complexity and risk of being looked upon as a biased professional is told by MD (Interview, 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2018), who was open about her bipolar disorder and multiple hospitalisations in psychiatric units. She articulates how her colleagues questioned her empathy, stated she was biased and her suggestions were affected by irrelevant to the service users or motivated by her personal experiences. Raun (2012) puts forward that both coming out and "the closet" metaphor involves oppression and discriminatory acts relate to visibility and presence.

The fourth and last position, *passing incognito*, signifies multiple reasons, not to disclose personal experiences. Aya (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2018) told me that she never tells her service users that she too is a service user and have been during the last 17 years. She talks through several reasons: the caseworker role when informing service users about unwanted decisions; how being *out* links to being unprofessional (depending on what it means to be professional); her critic of hidden yet self-interested motives to indicate an undeniable ability to

listen and understand in special way which is impossible for social workers without service user experiences; and finally the matter of protecting her private life as she writes adjudications on behalf of the employing municipality.

Aya's position can be interpreted in numerous ways. I focus on the reason related to her critic of hidden yet self-interested motives and find parallels to the resistance of inclusion Ahmed (2017) discussed. Ahmed sceptically argues inclusion is initiated with an invitation one ought to be grateful for. Still, with sometimes only a few options, we agree with inclusion within a certain institution of reproduced unjust logics because we have to survive and receive benefits (as a working relationship with the institution). Ahmed claims counter-arguments for inclusion as she finds it necessary to "*expose the injustice of how institutions give support to some by not supporting others*" (Ahmed 2017:264). Aya's reasons might not be examples of exposing unjust institutions but relates to a potential and sometimes manifest practice in an institution where service users must be grateful to be heard and understood by someone who recognises their struggles. Also embedded in Aya's critic it reminds us that inclusion is limited to the invited, both for service users in general and for the social workers with service user experiences who find it possible to be open about their experiences.

---

#### Practice makes perfect

Whilst positions of experience-management, have parallels and differences from coming out narratives and critic of both consequences of "the closet" and inclusion, altogether many of the practices of the social workers with service user experiences have matches with Raun's study of trans people, when it comes to the risk of the identity to be overdetermined. My above pre-analysis hints that the implications of practices performed by social workers with service user experiences involves evoking bundles of sites with tensions in personal experiences, social connections and theoretical comprehensions of practice. As my pre-analysis focusses on experience-management, Schatzki's *practical understandings* emphasise the knowing of how to manage particular tasks. Experience-management is based on lived experiences within different roles of the service user and social worker.

Camacho (2016) calls attention to the emotional aspects of lived experiences as a part of his practice in caregiving, social work and research which is similar to the way some of the informants find the risk of being (seen as) less professional. Likewise, Schatzki's *teleoaffective structure* pays attention to relevant reactions and emotional responses to practice. With the suggestion to study emotional features of research processes (Camacho 2016), it calls for both my researcher sensitivity and for exploring the informants' possible emotional longing to be approached as whole and multi-experienced, yet also an emotional request not to be over-determined by their service user experiences in their social work practices.

As various degrees of being out(-ed) or disclosure are emphasised in three out of four positions, I underscore that *passing incognito* or being "in the closet" does not mean shame, denial or lack of reflexivity. Some of the interviewed social workers with service user experiences express the motivation to help others and break taboos associated with e.g. drug abuse or psychiatry in various experience-management positions. Likewise, I find critical strategies across the

positions related to the discourse of a social change expected to be carried by such social workers. As Raun (2014) stresses: who is given voice and agency – which experiences or who has to be revealed or explained and for whose sake? To some degree practice seems to favour the ones, who appear “open” and “honest”, which links to trustworthiness. In spite of that, it depends on the seeing eye, as openness can lead to negative consequences for the individual social worker.

Across positions of experience-management, the informants call for forums with other social workers and accentuate the absence of such. Managing service user experiences is a lonesome job and is crucial to be able to discuss and inform social work practices performed by social workers with service user experiences.

## Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have discussed my comprehensions of participatory practice research and theoretical approach to practices in social work related to the study of the implications ascribed to service user experiences among social workers and the connected potential contributions to social work. Within Schatzki's practice theory frame, the social workers' practices as doings and sayings with emphasis on their practical understandings and the teleoaffective structures, their service user experiences produces opportunities and dilemmas when managing “being a social worker and service user in the same body”. Positions of experience-management are important to professional responsibility and helping service users. I discussed four positions: Out, Disclosure in specific situations, Indicated or outed by others or structures and Passing incognito. The positions stress various circumstances affecting their particular practice. However, the absence of forums to share experience-management influence both practical understandings and teleoaffective structures. As no guidelines are given, the powerful structures are arbitrary and at times hidden in social affairs. It leads to a lonesome task for the individual social worker to solve via self-reflexivity.

I have argued that patterns in experience-management are parallel to coming out narratives; nevertheless, the same patterns differ from the gay, lesbian, and bisexual narratives. The risk to be looked upon as less professional links to trans coming out narratives, when overdetermination jeopardises the size of the experiences. The potentials and struggles in the experience-management display, among others, in relationships with service users, social work colleagues, managers, internship supervisors. The consequences of the social workers' personal service user experiences come to light in work-related social sites. As social workers' personal service user experiences seem to scratch the norms in social work practice, the experiences associated with delicate power structures: uncertain expectations, unspoken rules, and questioning the legitimacy of social workers' involvement of their user experiences in practice.

The delicate power structures bring attention to what kind of emphasis is put on lived experience as a part of a particular social work practice. Therefore, I call for further discussions of the norms of social work practices and involvement of lived (service user) experience in social work.

## Bibliography

- Ahmed, S. (2017): "Conclusion 2: A killjoy manifesto", In *Living a Feminist Life*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 251-268.
- Alcoholics Anonymous: *The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Alcoholics Anonymous, viewed 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2018: <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/about-aa/the-12-steps-of-aa>
- Andersen, M. L., Brandt, L. I. and Uggerhøj, L. (2017): "Inddragelse i praksis – om et praksisforsknings-projekt", in *Uden for Nummer*, No. 35, pp. 4-15
- Berger, R. (2015): "Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research", In *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), pp. 219-234.
- Camacho, D. (2016): "Blurring boundaries: An emotionally aware caregiver, social worker, and researcher", In *Qualitative Social Work*, 15 (5-6), pp. 682-695.
- Epstein, I., Fisher, M., Julkunen, I., Uggerhøj, L., J. Austin, M., & Sim, T. (2015): "The New York Statement on the Evolving Definition of Practice Research Designed for Continuing Dialogue: A Bulletin From the 3rd International Conference on Practice Research", in *Research on Social Work Practice*, 25(6), pp. 711-714.
- Haraway, D. (1988): "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", In *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, (autumn), pp. 575-599
- Helsinki Forum Group (2014): "Helsinki Statement on social work practice research" In *Nordic Social Research* 4.1: pp. 1-7
- Jabbar, A. (2011): "Language, power and implications for interprofessional collaboration: reflections on a transition from social work to medicine", In *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 25(6), pp. 447-448.
- Julkunen, I. and L. Uggerhøj (2016): "Negotiating Practice Research", in *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 36:1, pp. 6-10
- Korsbek, L. (2013a): "Speaking out – Illness Insight and Recovery: How Important is Illness Insight in Peoples' Recovery Process?" in *American Psychological Association*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 222-225
- Korsbek, L. (2013b): "Disclosure: What is the point and for whom?" in *Journal of Mental Health*, 22:3, pp. 283-290
- Korsbek, L. (2016): "Corecovery: Mental health recovery in a dynamic interplay between humans in a relationship", in *American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 196-205
- Leathard, A. (2007): "Models for interprofessional collaboration", In A. Leathard (Ed.), *Interprofessional Collaboration: From Policy to Practice in Health and Social Care* (pp. 93-118). Routledge.
- Manning, J. (2014): "Communicating Sexual Identities: A typology of Coming Out", In *Sexuality & Culture*, 19(1), pp. 122-138
- Markard, M. K. Holzkamp, and O. Dreier (2004): "PraksisPortræt – En guide til analyse af psykologpraksis", In *Nordiske Udkast*, Vol. 2, pp. 5-22, Odense: Syddansk Universitets Forlag
- MB forløbet: *Medarbejder med Brugererfaring*, MB forløbet, viewed 5th of November 2018 <http://xn--mbforlobet-q8a.dk/medarbejder-med-brugererfaring-mb/>
- Närhi, K. (2016): "The changing understandings of the 'person in environment' in organizing public social work practice", In Matthies, A.-L., & Närhi, K. (Eds.), *The ecosocial transition of societies: The contribution of social work and social policy*, Oxford: Routledge.
- Nurius, P.S., & S. P. Kemp (2014): "Transdisciplinarity and Translation: Preparing Social Work Doctoral Students for High Impact Research", In *Research on Social Work Practice*, 24(5), pp. 625-635.
- Plummer, K. (1995): *Telling Sexual Stories*, London: Routledge
- Raun, T. (2012): *Out Online – trans self-representation and community building on YouTube*, Roskilde: Roskilde Universitet.



- Raun, T. (2014): "Trans as Contested Intelligibility: Interrogating how to Conduct Trans Analysis with Respectful Curiosity", In *LAMBDA NORDICA*, 1(2014), pp. 13-37.
- Salisbury Forum Group (2011): "The Salisbury Statement", in *Social Work and Society*, 9.1: pp. 4-9
- Schatzki, T. R. & W. Natter (1996): "Sociocultural Bodies, Bodies sociopolitical", In J. P. Jones III, W. Natter and T. R. Schatzki (Eds.), *The Social and Political Body*, Kentucky: The Guilford Press.
- Schatzki, T. R. (2002): *The Site of the social: a philosophical account of the constitution of social life and change*. University Park Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania state university press
- Socialstyrelsen: *Kortlægning af peer-støtte i Danmark*, the Danish National Board of Social Services, viewed 5th of November 2018, <https://socialstyrelsen.dk/udgivelser/kortlaegning-af-peer-stotte-i-danmark>
- Uggerhøj, L. (2008): "Practice research in Social Work: "hands on" knowledge production". In 19th World, *Conference of Social Work International Federation of Social Workers*, IFSW.
- Uggerhøj, L. (2014): "Learning from each other: collaboration processes in practice research", In *Nordic Social Work Research*, 4:sup1, pp. 44-57
- Uggerhøj, L. (2017): "Possibilities and barriers in practice research approaches" In *Brugerstemmer, Praxisforskning og Innovation*, Støkken, A. & E. Willumsen (eds.), Kristiansand: Portal Forlag
- Uggerhøj, L, T. J. Sim. M. Austin, F. Abdullah, TMS. Chan, M. Chok, K. Cui, I. Epstein, M. Fisher, L. Joubert, I. Julkunen, R. Ow, S. Wang, M. Webber, K. Wong, & L. Yiruka (2019): 'The Hong Kong Statement on Practice Research 2017: Contexts and Challenges of the Far East' In *Research on Social Work Practice* (in press)
- Vidensportal: *Centrale peerstøtte-initiativer i Danmark*, Vidensportalen på det sociale område/ the Danish National Board of Social Services, viewed 5th of November 2018, <https://vidensportal.dk/voksne/peer-stotte/centrale-peerstotte-initiativer-i-danmark-1>

## Appendix 1

Illustration of preliminary coded thematic based on the project's interviews. Subthemes are not included in the below.

